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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: GOF CONTINUES TO ADVISE IRAN AGAINST INTERFERENCE
IN IRAQI POLITICS

REF: STATE 41597

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons
1.5 (b) and (d).

1. (C) We discussed reftel points on Iranian interference in Iraq with MFA Iraq desk officer Renaud Salins March 11. Salins confirmed to us that the GoF continued to regularly remind Iran of its responsibilities of non-interference in Iraq and the need for Iran to play a constructive role as Iraq's neighbor. Salins affirmed the GoF view that Iran has the greatest nuisance capacity of any of Iraq's neighbors, but concluded that the Iranian government had shown restraint and "could have done much more" to cause problems in Iraq. That said, the GoF had no problems raising the non-interference issue with the Iranian government, and would continue to do so.

2. (C) Salins observed that additional factors, such as Iranian government connections to many of the Iraqi Shi'a "List 169" political leaders and ties between Iranian and Iraqi Shi'a clergy, would make it difficult to limit Iranian influence over the Iraqi Transitional Government (ITG). Salins commented that during his earlier diplomatic posting in Tehran in the mid 1990's, he recalled that Dawa leader Ibrahim Ja'fari was active in soliciting support from Tehran-based diplomats for a local NGO to assist Iraqi refugees in Iran -- an activity presumably backed by the Iranian government. Salins recalled meeting Ja'fari's Canadian-born wife in Tehran at an event organized by the NGO, and was suprised to find that she would not shake his hand, presumably due to strict religious beliefs. Salins also cited the ties between Iraqi and Iranian Shi'a clergy as another "vector of influence" for Iran over Iraqi affairs. He noted that during the recent out-of-country voting (OCV) for Iran-based Iraqis, the highest vote totals -- some 15,000 -- were among Iraqis based in Qom. He speculated that this 15,000 figure, some 5 percent of Qom's estimated population, represented in large part Iran-based Iraqi Shi'a clergy, since Qom had no notable industry or commercial activity apart from serving as Iran's theocratic base. Salins added that the January 2005 OCV election data provided the first concrete basis on which to estimate the number of Iraqi Shi'a clergy still residing in Iran.

3. (U) Baghdad minimize considered.
Leach